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SUBJECT: 2009 OAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY WRAP-UP REPORT

Classified By: Ambassador Hector E. Morales, reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This cable is from the U.S. Permanent Mission to the Organization of American States.

¶2. (U) Note: This cable reports on activities at the Organization of American States General Assembly (OASGA) in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. We report on other OASGA decisions on Cuba in SEPTEL. Info addressees to this cable are largely posts in OAS permanent observer countries (See para 31). End note.

¶3. (U) Summary: Although the media and the public focused on Cuba at the OASGA, held June 2-4 in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, a number of other issues were discussed and resolved. Secretary Clinton headed the U.S. delegation and held a breakfast meeting with CARICOM foreign ministers (septel - notal). An unusual aspect of this year's session was the presence of three members of Congress -- William Delahunt, Chairman Elliot Engel, and Gregory Meeks -- accompanied by two HFAC staffers. Dinah Shelton, the U.S. candidate to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights was elected by a close margin, and other U.S. candidates won uncontested elections to other OAS positions.

¶4. (SBU) Summary continued: Most of the hemisphere's foreign ministers addressed the meeting, often concentrating on the Cuba issue but occasionally referring to the putative theme for the session, "Toward a Culture of non-Violence." Separate substantive dialogues were held between delegations and representatives from labor, civil society, the private sector, and OAS permanent observers. For the first time, several pro-democracy civil society organizations were barred from OASGA participation at the insistence of Venezuela and Bolivia, a point which was underscored in the dialogue session with civil society. A brief meeting of the Summit Implementation Review Group accepted Colombia's offer to host the VI Summit of the Americas. Trinidad and Tobago introduced a proposal for additional aid to Haiti and also presented a suggested upgrade to a air passenger information service utilized in the Caribbean. In addition to many representatives from international and inter-American organizations, 36 of the 60-plus OAS permanent observers sent representatives, many of whom announced voluntary pledges to support OAS projects and activities. End summary.

Atmospherics

¶5. (C) According to long-time OAS Secretariat staffers and other observers, this was the "worst general assembly ever"

in terms of organization and adherence to established procedure. They laid the blame squarely upon mercurial Honduran President "Mel" Zelaya and his Foreign Minister (FM), Patricia Rodas. Zelaya kept changing his mind and altering agreed-upon arrangements. He extended invitations to all ALBA presidents to attend the meeting, and FM Rodas met with her ALBA counterparts in Caracas to plan strategy prior to the OASGA. In the end, only Nicaraguan President Ortega came, along with Paraguayan President Lugo. Ecuador's President Correa visited San Pedro Sula prior to the meeting, but did not attend the OASGA. Venezuelan President Chavez, rumored to attend, cancelled his trip to El Salvador and Honduras alleging a "CIA plot" to shoot down his plane. Rodas, as host government FM, was elected to chair the meeting; in this capacity, Rodas was inept and incompetent, displayed blatant partisanship, ignored procedural advice from the OAS Secretary General and Assistant Secretary General (who were at the head table on either side of her), and simply talked way too much. The local press also criticized Rodas for her practices as chair and for wasting time and noted that her mismanagement prevented Secretary Clinton from delivering remarks prepared for the meeting.

Emphasis on Cuba at OASGA Inaugural Session

¶6. (SBU) President Zelaya emphasized that ministers should

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not leave San Pedro Sula without rescinding the 1962 resolution on Cuba. OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza said that his own position on Cuba was already well-known and added that the organization should remain true to its democratic principles, aspiration for inclusion, and operate based on the principle of consensus. Insulza noted that the leaders at the most recent Summit of the Americas provided a common agenda for the region, and highlighted some specific initiatives, including the Inter-American Social Protection Network, the need for a flexible and voluntary cooperation framework on energy, and President Obama's announcement on ratifying an inter-American convention against firearms trafficking. Challenging those who called for the OAS to be discarded, the SYG touted OAS activities in election observation and institutional strengthening in the region.

United States wins seat on OAS Human Rights Commission

¶7. (C) In a highly contested election, George Washington University Law Professor Dinah Shelton was elected to a four-year term on the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) with 20 votes. With Shelton's election, the United States retains the IACHR seat occupied by Notre Dame Law School Professor Paolo Carozza, whose term ends in December. The Secretary personally campaigned on Shelton's behalf, particularly with CARICOM foreign ministers. Others elected were Colombia's Rodrigo Escobar Gil, and Mexico's Jose de Jesus Orozco Henriquez, the latter receiving an overwhelming 32 votes. The loser was incumbent Victor Abramovich, of Argentina, with 19 votes. COMMENT: Various human rights organizations viewed Abramovich's defeat as a concrete example of ongoing efforts by certain OAS member states to undermine the effectiveness of the regional human rights system. There was a concerted effort by many member states to deny seats to the highly-qualified Abramovich and Shelton, with many delegations voting for only two candidates (Mexico and Colombia) and withholding their third vote. Voting was by secret ballot. Interestingly, Nicaraguan OAS PermRep Amb. Denis Moncada made a point of showing the United States his ballot, on which he had voted for Mexico, Colombia, and the United States. He said he wanted anybody but Abramovich.

Other elections at the OAS General Assembly

¶18. (U) Russell Wheeler of the Brookings Institution was elected by acclamation to another three-year term on the board of directors of the Santiago, Chile-based Justice Studies Center of the Americas. James Millette, the State Department's Chief Financial Officer, ran unopposed for a seat on the OAS Board of External Auditors. Newcomer Miguel Pichardo Olivier of the Dominican Republic will join re-elected incumbents Freddy Castillo Castellanos of Venezuela and Ana Elizabeth Villalta of El Salvador on the Inter-American Juridical Committee, an 11-member OAS advisory body on questions pertaining to international law. (David Stewart, formerly in the Legal Adviser's Office, is the current U.S. member.)

Foreign Ministers' Remarks at OAS General Assembly

¶19. (U) At the second plenary, 19 delegations made formal interventions, addressing topics such as non-violence, drug trafficking, and the impact of the global economic crisis. Most governments called for the OAS to rescind the 1962 resolution on Cuba. Delegations such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines characterized the resolution as "anachronistic," "callous," "unjust," "violent," etc. Panama called for a consensus resolution. The new FM-designate from El Salvador gave a moderate speech, stressing the need to enhance efforts on multidimensional security. Noting the restoration of diplomatic ties between the GOES and Cuba, he called for the OAS to do the same.

¶10. (U) The Government of Haiti thanked international donors for support, singling out Cuba for its agricultural and health assistance. The Government of Colombia reiterated its

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offer to host the Sixth Summit of the Americas, noting that the GOC deferred to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for the Fifth Summit.

¶11. (U) Those FMs who could not speak on Tuesday took the floor Wednesday to laud the Cuba resolution, and many from the Caribbean also addressed the theme of the OASGA - "Toward a Culture of Non-Violence." FM Rodas and President Zelaya of Honduras set the tone for the session. After announcing approval of the consensus resolution abrogating Cuba's 1962 suspension, FM Rodas stood up to lead the only standing ovation of the night. President Zelaya, speaking from the Honduran seat, asserted that all the countries were in full accordance with the decision to dissolve the 1962 resolution, which he termed a wise "rectification" for the Cuban people so that when they are ready to re-integrate, the door would be open.

¶12. (SBU) All speakers praised themselves and each other on the hard work and commitment to consensus. Many, even FM Maduro of Venezuela, praised the USG for its ability to work together with respect and true cooperation, and Maduro even applauded Secretary Clinton's diplomatic acumen. Every speaker except Canada and the United States voiced their enthusiasm for real hemispheric dialogue and cooperation, which many claimed had been jeopardized by the 1962 resolution.

¶13. (SBU) Only Venezuelan FM Maduro and Nicaraguan President Ortega remained hard-line throughout their interventions, saying that while a positive change had occurred, the U.S. trade embargo (termed a "blockade") would have to be lifted next. FM Maduro remained in the past, mentioning various "examples" of how the people of the hemisphere have lived and suffered because of past U.S. presidents. Ortega claimed that despite all the change President Obama had promised, he

was still following the policies of the Bush administration.

¶14. (U) FMs of Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico did not fail to mention their initiatives to re-integrate Cuba into the inter-American system through the Rio Group. None mentioned any conditions under which Cuba should return to the OAS. The Caribbean countries applauded the efforts of all, the elimination of the 1962 resolution, and looked to the future with excitement. Caribbean speakers also took pains to address non-violence, this year's theme. Costa Rica, Uruguay, the United States (WHA A/S Shannon), and Canada were the only countries to voice respect for the various inter-American legal instruments, including the Democratic Charter. Canada mentioned that the just-adopted Cuba resolution emphasized the importance of these instruments.

Remaining Resolutions Close in General Committee

¶15. (U) New resolutions and those unresolved in Washington are considered by the OASGA General Committee, which meets simultaneously with the plenary sessions. The USOAS Mission successfully negotiated remaining resolutions on issues ranging from member support of the democratic institutional system amid current challenges in Guatemala to fundraising for peaceful settling of territorial disputes. The drawn-out battle between the United States and Venezuela to win support for their respective versions of the resolution "Freedom of Thought and Expression and the Importance of the Media" ended with Venezuela yielding to the U.S. text.

¶16. (SBU) Colombia presented a last-minute resolution for "Support for the Recapitalization of the Inter-American Development Bank in the Context of the International Economic and Financial Crisis." A concern arose because this is a decision for the IDB board of governors, because the resolution discussed issues outside the mandate of the OAS, and because the proposed capital increase does not constitute a short-term crisis-response tool. Colombian PermRep Amb. Ospina personally defended the resolution against any alternative language proposed by the U.S., but eventually the two countries agreed on language, thanks in part to a compromise proposal from Mexico, and adopted a resolution calling for consideration of the recapitalization.

Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) Meets

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¶17. (U) Trinidad and Tobago's Minister in the PM's office Lenny Saith chaired a brief SIRG meeting on June 3. After reviewing the implementation status (generally, only just beginning) of the many mandates from the April 2009 Summit, delegations were invited to comment. Most remarks focused on the positive spirit and outcome of the Summit in Port of Spain. Fourteen countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Venezuela) endorsed Colombia's bid to host the VI Summit of the Americas, which based on the Declaration of Port of Spain, will occur in 2012. No country posed any objections. Paraguay had previously offered to host as well; both contenders resolved the issue prior to the SIRG. Paraguay will reportedly host an Ibero-American Summit instead.

Workers' Representatives "Dialogue" With Heads of Delegation
at OASGA

¶18. (U) On June 1, representatives of workers' unions presented their views to Heads of Delegations on the meeting's theme, "Toward a Culture of Non-Violence." The

consensus among the three representatives chosen to speak was that the current economic crisis created conditions for governments to try to limit labor union activity and that social development and social dialogue are the best avenues to deal with this. The U.S. Alternate Representative pointed out that President Obama stated recently that we cannot have a strong middle class without a strong labor movement. She stressed the importance of workers' rights and freedom of association.

¶19. (U) The Argentine Assistant Secretary for International Affairs took the opportunity to announce that at the upcoming XVI Meeting of Ministers of Labor (to take place late September 2009 in Buenos Aires), Ministers of Finance would also be invited to attend. He pointed out that the crisis has forced all of us to seek a fresh perspective and since what happens in the finance sector has a direct impact on the labor sector, their views need to be incorporated, as well.

Private Sector Stresses Public-Private Partnership

¶20. (U) Representatives from the private sector presented their perspectives to heads of delegation in an open "dialogue" on the margins of the General Assembly. The importance of public-private sector partnerships was emphasized, although the importance of job creation, especially for youth, and the impact of crime and violence on business were also stressed.

¶21. (U) The Private Sector of the Americas representative opened the meeting by singling out the U.S. Alternate Representative for her role in the genesis of the Private Sector Forum. The U.S. Alternate Representative spoke of the need to incorporate private sector perspectives beyond Summit and OASGA events and into other high-level meetings such as Ministerials. She also emphasized the State Department's commitment to public-private partnerships, highlighting the newly launched Global Partnerships Initiative.

Civil Society Representatives Criticize Attempts to Limit their Actions

¶22. (U) Also on June 1, civil society representatives engaged OASGA heads of delegation on topics related to violence, democracy, and human rights. In their prepared statements, NGO representatives called upon member states to adhere to the principles of the Inter-American Democratic Charter and reverse laws that are severely limiting the ability of NGOs to act independently in the region. Several participants criticized the OAS for allowing Venezuela and Bolivia to veto the participation of civil society organizations in the General Assembly proceedings. Other NGOs underscored growing threats to freedom of expression and an independent press and tacit support for anti-Semitism in

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Venezuela. A coalition of NGOs representing LGBT rights also called upon the OAS to work to end violence based on sexual orientation. A local Honduran NGO called for the abrogation of Cuba's 1962 suspension, while also accusing the Government of Honduras of violating the Democratic Charter.

¶23. (U) In response to NGO criticism of the Government of Venezuela, Venezuelan OAS PermRep Amb. Roy Chaderton argued that NGOs in Venezuela regularly seek to destabilize the country and use the OAS as a platform to embarrass President Chavez. He accused the media in Venezuela of "media terrorism" and spreading false information, and noted that media monopolies - including Fox News - undermine true "participatory" democracy by hampering citizen expression and dignity. The Bolivian representative criticized the OAS for supporting a platform at the OASGA for civil society

dialogue, stating that member states should control the terms of participation of NGOs in the Organization. (Note: The U.S. was the only member state that provided funds to the OAS Secretariat allowing for the organization of the dialogue and the travel of NGOs to the OASGA.)

¶24. (U) The U.S. Alternate Representative underscored strong U.S. support for pro-democracy NGOs and human rights defenders, including their active participation in the OAS, and recalled the recent 60th anniversary of the adoption of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man as well as the Universal Declaration. She also underscored the U.S. commitment to eliminate violence and discrimination against people based on sexual orientation or gender identity. She concluded by urging OAS member states to seek principled partnerships with civil society, based on respect for fundamental civil and political rights. At the end of the U.S. intervention, the NGO audience responded with applause and loud chants of "O-ba-ma."

OASGA Considers Potpourri of Perennial Issues in Grinding Late Night Session

¶25. (U) In the first half of the fourth and final plenary of the OASGA, delegates considered a wide range of topics viewed as perennial issues in the OAS, ranging from Argentina's quest to resolve the sovereignty of the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands, Bolivia's longstanding dispute with Chile over its access to the seacoast, and the annual report of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM) run by the Inter-American Commission Against Drug Abuse (CICAD). While numerous delegations spoke up in support of Argentina's claim to the Falkland Islands, only Venezuela spoke up on Bolivia's maritime issue "in solidarity" with its sister republic.

¶26. (U) After Antigua and Barbuda, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Mexico spoke on the perils of climate change, Bolivia presented a hastily written ALBA declaration on the same issue. The U.S. delegation clarified that the OASGA would not adopt this declaration, and the Secretariat said the issue would be considered at a future meeting of the Permanent Council.

¶27. (U) In a presentation on "Summit Follow Up on Haiti," Trinidad and Tobago proposed that the OAS consider establishing a hemispheric fund for Haiti based on voluntary fund contributions to support economic development projects in Haiti. The Haitian delegation thanked Trinidad and Tobago for its proposal and acknowledged in its remarks the potential impact of HOPE II legislation passed by the U.S. Congress to spur jobs and investment.

¶28. (U) In a subsequent presentation, Trinidad and Tobago proposed that the OAS Committee on Hemispheric Security and the OAS Inter-American Committee on Terrorism (CICTE) should examine an initiative to upgrade and augment the capabilities of the Advanced Passenger Information System (APIS) managed by a joint regional center in the Caribbean, to increase information sharing about passenger manifests.

¶29. (U) Representatives from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and the Inter-American Juridical Committee gave brief reports to the meeting, with reference to the printed annual reports of those entities, which had been distributed prior to the

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OASGA.

¶30. (U) Finally, the OAS Secretariat delivered a brief presentation on the Annual Report of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), noting its recent decision to review the hemispheric strategy to fight drugs. Bolivia

was the only delegation to comment on this report, noting Bolivia's progress on eradicating illicit crops in light of the "nationalization" of its anti-drug strategy.

Permanent Observers make statements, announce contributions

¶31. (U) 36 OAS permanent observer countries sent delegations to the meeting, including Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Daniel Ayalon, Bosnia's Foreign Minister Sven Alkalaj, Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic, and China's Ambassador to Washington Zhou Wenzhong. Spain and France, which both maintain observer missions in Washington separate from their embassies, also participated prominently. In a luncheon for heads of permanent observer delegations on June 1, 22 representatives spoke, pledging their commitment to the principles of the OAS and in many cases announcing new pledges of contributions to OAS projects and activities. (In 2008, permanent observer countries donated \$25.8 million to OAS projects dealing with democracy promotion, electoral observation, conflict resolution, human rights, drug abuse control, integral development, and other goals.)

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